



Going after the desert bighorn is Utah's toughest hunt.

Desert bighorn is prized, but a very tough hunt

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The life and times of Utah's desert bighorn sheep populations has risen and fallen like an elevator.

This has been due, mainly, to disease within two San Juan units — North and South.

Just when biologists felt the herds in the two areas were established and healthy, disease struck and numbers dropped dramatically. For several years game biologists reported no lamb production within the two herds.

In 1986, on the north unit, three hunters shot three rams for 100 percent success. Last year, because of low numbers, there was no hunt. In the south unit, in 1986, five permits were issued and five rams taken for, again, 100 percent success. Last year only two permits went out and only one was filled.

Because of the rugged terrain and the arid climate where the sheep range, the hunt for the desert bighorn sheep is considered the most difficult of any hunt offered in Utah.

The animal, also, is one of the most prized of the sheep family. Because of it, Utah auctions off one permit each year, with the money from the permit going back into the state's bighorn program. Last year a hunter paid \$20,000 for the permit. The highest amount paid for the permit was in 1984 when it fetched \$33,000.

Overall last year, 13 permits went to Utah hunters, one went to

a nonresident and one went out to bid. The 13 hunters spent a total of 105 days in the field and 10 were able to fill tags. Both the nonresident and the bid hunters took rams last year.

The desert bighorn is native to southeastern Utah. Early Indians, in fact, tell about the sheep in their rock art.

Father Escalante, who traversed the area in 1776, mentions the bighorn, as does John Wesley Powell on his first float down the Colorado River in 1869.

In the 1940s and 1950s, however, during the uranium boom, the sheep suffered from the influx of people.

In 1975, because of a strong herd in the San Juan area, aerial transplants began. In 1982, for example, 46 sheep were moved out of the Canyonlands National Park and relocated into three areas.

While the San Juan units have dropped in numbers in recent years, other areas have shown steady increases.

In the Potash unit, for example, aerial counts in 1986 showed 39 animals and last year showed 74.

The Escalante River unit has also fallen on hard times. In 1989, officers counted 62 sheep, but only counted 25 in 1990.

In the North San Rafael unit, 26 sheep were counted in 1986, while 133 were counted in 1989. There was no survey last year.

Utah's deer hunt to get

Utah hunters will have to make a choice in 1993: Hunt with a bow and arrow, a muzzleloader or a high-powered rifle. One only. That's the way it will be.

The move last month by the Board of Big Game Control is considered one of the most progressive taken in recent years to improve the overall hunting experience in Utah.

For a number of years, now, there have been complaints of overcrowding during the annual hunt, which draws upwards of 180,000 hunters.

There have also been complaints of too few bucks, especially mature buck.

Plans are to have the full program in operation by 1993.

What it means is:

- Hunters will be required to choose the way they want to hunt deer, either with bow and arrow, muzzleloader or rifle.

Deer

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Generally, though, he said field officers said they felt they were seeing more deer this year.

SOUTHERN REGION

The forecast here is the reverse of the northern area. Big game manager Floyd Coles said he expects success to be down from last year.

"We did not have a good fawn crop this year," he noted, "which means we'll have fewer yearling deer.

"We've still got a good deer herd, and hunters will see deer, but we're still feeling the effects of the drought. Deer numbers are still down."

He added that forage and water conditions were a lot better this year than they've been the past two, but that it will take a few years for the deer to benefit from the improvements.

Also, he said, some of the southern areas get hit pretty hard by hunters, such as the Mt. Dutton, Pine Valley and Parowan units . . .

"And I don't see any indication of a chance in hunting pressure. I think these areas are going to get hit hard again this year."

CENTRAL REGION

Paul Tervort, regional game manager, said he expects hunting to be very similar to last year in terms of success.

Two areas, Stansbury and Tintic, he pointed out, will carry only three-day hunts . . . "because of the drought poor fawn production

Dwight Bunnell, big game program coordinator for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, pointed out to the board that primitive weapons hunters have little impact on the deer population and are therefore the group where an increase in numbers is preferred. Annual success runs about 13 percent on the archery hunt. Success on the general rifle has been as high as 40 percent.

The board agreed to acceptable limits on the three hunts. Consensus was to try for 110,000 or less for the general rifle, 40,000 for the archery season and 16,000 for the



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